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21 May 1982

Nicaragua: Talking Points on Domestic Situation

A growing insurgency, perceived foreign threats, and the departure of many opposition leaders--some to join revolutionary hero Eden Pastora--are giving the Sandinistas new justification to consolidate their control and bear down on domestic opponents.

- The Sandinistas are convinced that the US is not seriously interested in negotiations, but rather is bent on toppling their regime.
- From their perspective, increasing activity by foreign-based anti-Sandinistas, US military aid to Honduras, recent diplomatic pressures against Nicaragua, and the failure of the left to gain power in El Salvador constitute evidence of Washington's conspiracy to destroy the revolution.
- External and internal pressures have become so great, in Managua's view, that accelerated repression of opposition elements and mass mobilization of the population appear necessary, even if such moves jeopardize access to Western financial sources.

Since the suspension of most civil liberties in March, the regime has halted virtually all non-Sandinista political activity and strengthened its ability to regiment the population.

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- Several opposition party and labor union activists have been arrested and many of their leaders have been denied permission to leave the country.
- Sandinista thugs continue periodically to harass moderates.
- Recent decrees allow the regime to impose "war taxes" and to extend government control over the economy.
- The imposition of prior censorship and the banning of non-official radio newscasts now give the Sandinistas almost total control over the press and radio.
- Neighborhood committees--patterned after the Cuban model--have been instructed to report "counterrevolutionary" activities to the security forces.
- Militia recruitment drives have been stepped up, and harsh measures are being employed to coerce or punish those who resist recruitment.
- Through a combination of pressure and patriotic appeals, the Sandinistas have succeeded in increasing discipline in the labor force--a major accomplishment after strikes, absenteeism, and work stoppages became almost endemic last year.

Soon after Pastora's denunciation of the Sandinistas in April, regime leaders began a well-orchestrated campaign to discredit him.

- Several former guerrillas who had fought under him publicly repudiated Pastora's action and accused him of selling out to "US imperialism."

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- Army Chief of Staff Cuadra--widely considered a moderate Sandinista--publicly called Pastora a traitor and made a thinly-veiled threat against his life.
- Managua also sent a high-level delegation to warn San Jose against allowing Pastora and his followers to use Costa Rican territory as a base for raids against Nicaragua.
- The Sandinistas have also warned leaders of Panama's National Guard not to support Pastora.

Former junta member Alfonso Robelo--a key moderate leader--has given up opposition politics from inside Nicaragua.

- He has gone into exile with some of his followers, and reportedly will soon declare publicly his support for Pastora.
- Other moderates are making preparations to flee the country or go into hiding; those who will not or cannot leave are taking steps to disassociate themselves from Pastora, Robelo, and other exiles.
- The decision of central bank chairman Cesar not to return to Nicaragua has damaged the Sandinistas' image in international financial circles.

The Sandinistas do not wish to jeopardize their access to Western economic and financial aid by completely eliminating opposition and private sector groups, but radicalization is being driven by forces that are likely to grow.

- A serious armed challenge by Pastora or others would lead to outright Sandinista suppression of opposition elements nationwide.

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